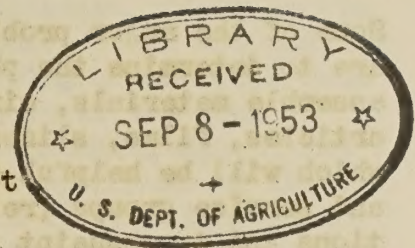


Extension Service
U. S. Dept. of Agr.
Washington 25, D. C.

MERCHANDISING PRACTICES AND
EDUCATION PROGRAMS*

by

Esther Cooley
Consumer Education Specialist
Baton Rouge, Louisiana



In Director Ferguson's letter to our Louisiana Director Sanders he asked that I tell about the Consumer Education program of Extension Service in Louisiana, with special emphasis on the home furnishing phases.

Our interpretation in Louisiana of Consumer Education is that it is not an isolated field but that it reaches across the whole field of spending. It is not a seasonal project, for spending is spread throughout the year. The program of the Consumer Education project, may be coordinated with the program of the projects in most of the other fields. The Consumer Education Specialist has found herself therefore working with the other homemaking specialist and with those specialists in the production fields whose work directly touches the home-making spending, such as the specialists in poultry, in dairying, and in horticulture. Sometimes I almost feel like a Jack of all trades and Master of none. It has been a most challenging job, however, and I have enjoyed it from the very beginning. I have enjoyed the contacts I have made and appreciate the cooperation and help I have received from the other specialists.

In our Economy, buying plays a large part in the lives of all people, whether they live on the farm, in a rural area and work elsewhere, in a small town or in a large urban area. Whether purchases are made of Clothing, Equipment, Foods or Home Furnishings, there are certain buying principles which will help the individual to get his money's worth by buying wisely. Our Consumer Education project, therefore, has tried through the Home Demonstration Agents and the Consumer Education leaders, as well as through direct contact with consumers, to teach basic buying principles to the women of the State and to some extent to the men of the State, as well as a small extent to the 4-H Club boys and girls.

With the world situation as it is and with the introduction of new materials, household articles, equipment and foods to the consumer market it is necessary that the Consumer Education Specialist be continually on the alert to try to interpret these changes to the women with whom she works. The present day market, to many Consumers, is quite confusing and therefore they

*Paper presented at National Home Furnishings Conference at Chicago, Ill., April 29, 1953.

are more willing to be guided in their selection of consumer goods than ever before.

Some of the major problems which confront the Consumer Education Specialist are to determine the phases of Consumer Education to work on; to write and assemble materials, circular letters, radio scripts, TV scripts, news articles, films, slides, demonstration and other illustrative material-, which will be helpful to the agents; to contact consumer groups, producers and service groups (retailers and handlers) in order to learn their situations and to acquaint them with the possibilities of the service that Extension has to offer along these particular lines; and to assemble materials which will be helpful to the Specialist in Consumer Education in developing her own program.

You can see what I meant about the "Jack of All Trades". I am reminded of a story that I heard a president of the National Federation of Women's Clubs tell. She was on her way to the West Coast and had to change trains in a small Midwestern town. In the station was a very attractive young woman. The two women began to talk about various things and finally the younger woman unburdened her soul to the older one and said how worried she was for she had a paper to write for the Federated Club to which she belonged. The older woman was at once very interested in knowing what the subject was. The Title of the paper was to be "The Nations of the World and their Customs" and she had been given twenty minutes for her paper. You might say that Consumer Education represents "the nations of the world and their customs" but I will only take one of the nations and its customs in the time allowed to me and tell you about the work that has been done in Louisiana in the field of Home Furnishing in cooperation with the Home Furnishing and Housing Specialists.

Before I came into the Extension Service, the Home Furnishing and Housing Specialist, Rogenia Green Trotter, whom some of you know, had held a Home Furnishing Clinic in one of the parishes and plans were under way to hold similar clinics in other parishes of the State. It was believed that one of the means of accomplishing some of the objectives of the Consumer Education program would be for me to work with the Home Furnishing and Housing Specialist in holding the Home Furnishing Clinics in some of the small towns in the State.

This is the procedure for setting up and holding the clinic. The Home Demonstration Agent in the parish makes the contact with the local furniture merchant and sells the idea to him of holding such a clinic in his store. The two Specialists meet with the home demonstration agent and her home demonstration council, as well as with the owner or some representative of the furniture store, some weeks prior to the holding of the clinic. Plans are made at this meeting and the date set. (It later developed that the Consumer Education Specialist took care of this initial planning meeting.)

One day is needed to set up the clinic. In each place the owner of the store turns over his facilities and has men available to move and place

the furniture. Actual rooms (living and/or bed room) are set up. The Home Furnishing Specialist is largely responsible for setting up these rooms. If space is adequate, rooms representing different income levels are arranged from the furniture available in the store. They are made as attractive and homelike as possible, sometimes by using accessories from adjacent stores. On the day of the clinic the members of the Home Demonstration Council act as hostesses. The Home Furnishing Specialist demonstrates the use of color and materials in the furnishings of the rooms as well as proper lighting and the arrangement of furniture in the rooms. The Consumer Education Specialist demonstrates the points to look for in buying furniture, as well as mattresses, pillows and other articles of bedding. The demonstrations are given by means of charts showing the actual materials and using some of the articles in the rooms that are set up such as a chair, a dresser drawer. The actual cost of the rooms is given after the audience has been given an opportunity to guess the cost. The members of the audience are also given an opportunity to register their preferences of the rooms and to say which room or rooms would more nearly fit into their own home situation. Folders, containing additional information, are distributed at the end of the clinic.

(Charts on chairs, etc., label, folder material)

The Consumer Interest Committee of the American Home Economics Association has been working a number of years to develop standards that it hopes will serve as buying guides. They have already published two "How to Buy Leaflets - One on straight chairs and one on Sheets". You will learn about them from time to time in the Journal of Home Economics.

A Study of the Effectiveness of home furnishings clinics ^{1/} was the outgrowth of a course in evaluation at the Regional School at the University of Arkansas. The usual procedure of pretesting the schedule and sampling was followed and five of the parishes where Rogenia Trotter and I have held the clinics were used in the study. Here are a few of the findings and interpretations that were drawn from the study. We wanted to know what were the opinions of the women, of the home demonstration agent, and of merchants and just how effective this means of teaching the Home Furnishing Clinics had been.

"We wanted to know what was the opinion of the

Women

They suggested: -

1. Improvement of the physical conditions under which the clinics were held -- better hearing and seeing facilities -- they suggested a raised platform;

^{1/} The Effectiveness of Home Furnishings Clinics by Esther Cooley. 1950. Extension Service, Baton Rouge La.

2. That information be included on about arranging furniture in a small apartment and in a small room in a house;
3. Furniture used at the clinic not be above the economic level of most of the women;
4. Folders, given out at the end of the meeting, were complete and helpful;
5. Additional help be given on rugs, carpets, draperies, lighting, pictures, electrical appliances, kitchen and closet arrangement.

Home Demonstration Agent

1. Suggested the clinics be continued and felt that the public had been given an opportunity of learning of a different service Extension can offer.

They considered that actually seeing the set up rooms gave the women concrete ideas of arranging their own rooms. It was a wonderful means of teaching, and it furnished useful information for follow-up work with Home Demonstration clubs and 4-H Clubs. They thought, the method used was satisfactory and effective and the time (forty-five minutes) allotted each specialist was about right.

2. Limiting the subject matter, rather than having it cover too much territory; adding more details in furniture buying and more emphasis on color combinations. Another agent suggested larger and more colorful charts (this suggestion was made by the agent where the first clinic was held -- larger and more colorful charts were made for succeeding clinics).

Merchants

1. The merchants were found to be well pleased with the clinics that had been held in their stores. They all wanted to know when there would be held other clinics on other subjects and were ready to put their facilities at the disposal of Extension.
2. In some instances there was a very decided improvement in the stock of furniture on the floor and in the manner in which it was displayed.
3. The clinics had brought people into their stores who would not have come otherwise and the people had been more buying-conscious and more quality-conscious.
4. One merchant said he considered the clinic a most effective way of educating the people and that it strengthened his program of trying to put good merchandise before the public.

5. One merchant suggested that not so much material be covered at one time. Break the information down into smaller doses.
6. Another merchant emphasized the far reaching importance of the 4-H Club girl in the home furnishing and buying practices of the family.

All the opinions were not favorable as you can see and Rogenia and I tried, in the clinics we have held since the study was made, to improve our demonstrations in the light of the opinions that were given by the women, the Home Demonstration Agents and the merchants.

Another thing we wanted to know was whether there was any action taken by the women after the clinic. It was gratifying to find that:

93% had taken the folder home
88% had read the information
53% had used the information given in the folder

Still another question was from what sources do the women get home furnishing information.

93% daily paper
65% weekly paper

Even though 100% of the homes visited had radios only 89% obtained information from the radio. These women indicated they did not "radio" -- either because of lack of time or that they had become tired of it.

Even though 95% of the women receive Home Furnishing information from Extension it shows, I believe, that extension can work through and use these other channels for dispensing information.

The data were further analyzed in the light of some of the face data for instance, the influence of the ages of the children in the home on the use of Home Furnishing information; and the use of Home Furnishing Clinic information by younger and older women. This information is recorded in the study.

It was felt that the study indicated the Home Furnishing Clinic was an effective and satisfactory method of extension teaching from the standpoint of the women who attended, the agents in whose parishes the clinics were held and the merchants in whose stores they were held.

There have been Home Furnishing Clinics held in about 1/3 of the parishes in the State with an attendance of anywhere from 60 to 300 at a meeting. This year 5 adjacent parishes worked together on one clinic held in the parish which was centrally located and which had the furniture store that could accommodate the clinic. The agents of these 5 parishes were largely responsible for setting up the rooms with the help of the Specialists and an interior decorator, who is a member of the store's staff. Mrs. Jessie Mae Hill is our Home Furnishing and Housing Specialist now and is attending this conference. She was initiated into Home Furnishing Clinics at the 5 parish clinic. She used, very effectively, a film strip on color to bring out the points on color.

All situations have not been ideal and perhaps you can see something of the situations in which we have worked from these pictures which have been blown up from $2\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{4}$ time exposure pictures. (Pictures, Folder Chart and Table Top Tips displayed)

As I said in the beginning our Consumer Education program in Louisiana is interpreted as cutting across the board. It is for that reason that last year we published a kit known as Table Top Tips which gives the basic information underlying buying in the 4 major home making fields, Clothing, Equipment, Foods and Home Furnishings. The owl has more or less been the symbol or trade mark of Consumer Education. Sometimes he looks as if he is a wise old bird and sometimes he looks kind of stupid and then again you can't tell whether he is wise or stupid. We hope we are following the Wise old owl in our interpretation of Consumer Education -- giving the people of Louisiana information which will help them "Be Wise When they Buy" whether it is Clothing, Equipment, Food or Home Furnishings.